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INTRODUCTION



Limited Statehood and its Security Implications on the Fragmentation Political Order in the Middle East and North Africa

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One, hundred, thousand shapes of limited statehood

The domestic dimension of sovereignty, or statehood, can take a number of shapes within a continuum punctuated by different degrees of state's capacities. Stephen Krasner and Thomas Risse conceptualize statehood as the effective domestic dimension of sovereignty,¹ thereby referring to the organization of public authority within a state and its level of effective control.² At one end of the continuum lies consolidated statehood, which refers to the institutional structure of authority possessing the monopoly of force and the capacity to implement decisions. At the opposite of consolidated statehood lies 'limited' statehood, which can manifest itself within a wide range of degrees of intensity and modalities.³ In areas of limited statehood (ALS), the capacity to implement and enforce central decisions is lacking and there is no monopoly of the use of force.⁴ The restriction of statehood can occur on a sectoral level (only in some policy areas); a territorial level (only on some parts of the territory); a temporal level (only for a certain amount of time); and a social level (only with regard to specific parts of the population).

Given its functionalist but refined understanding of different varieties of statehood, limited statehood represents a potentially useful but under-exploited analytical category which, while not subsuming similar existing approaches such as hybrid governance, hybrid political order, ungoverned spaces and heterarchy, can relate to all of them and provide fruitful cross-fertilizations. Taken together,

the articles contained in this Special Issue are an attempt to assess the degree to which such nuanced notions of statehood shed light on the evolving nature of conflict-torn political orders, such as Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Libya, Mali and other polities such as Lebanon and Tunisia, where the role of external actors remains crucial. All articles of the SI engage, in some form or another, with problematizing and questioning conceptualizations of post-Westphalian sovereignty.

We believe ALS could, and should, be further enriched as an analytical approach by an even more systematic dialogue with the above-mentioned approaches. For one thing, 'the limited statehood' approach allows to sidestep widely used⁵ albeit discredited⁶ notions such as failed or fragile⁷ state. Thinking in terms of 'failed or failing' states brings attention to the fact that things are not going 'the way they should'. Initially, the notion challenged the normative idea that a malfunctioning of a state is likely to be a temporary situation – that will soon revert and bring the state back, and questioned the very idea that a state is a monolithic, or even *the* monolithic, starting point in the study of governance. However, it implicitly created a sort of box where all forms of non-performing states can be stored, regardless of their internal features, history and evolution.⁸ Particularistic views on the failed state, mostly based on case studies, have challenged the idea that states do not always function, and therefore 'fail', in the same, or in a similar way.⁹ Still, despite both empirically based criticisms and those pointing at the Eurocentric and normative bias implicit in this concept, no matter in which way a state 'fails' to act as a state, it is a 'failed state'. And yet, precisely, studies on informal forms of governance and security governance in particular bring our attention to the persistence of informality as a defining feature of many hybrid political orders.¹⁰

Our starting assumption for this special issue has been the need to overcome state assessments based on variables linked to strength and weakness, against an ideal-typical, Western-modelled performing state.¹¹ In this respect, several studies on the Arab state have problematized the state as a contested arena for power struggle among a plurality of social forces. The emphasis has been on endogenous factors and Arab agency, even vis-à-vis processes of negotiated statehood with external powers. Without delving into a review of the debate over the state and theories of state¹² or of the Arab state in particular,¹³ we are concerned here with how the notion of statehood, especially in the MENA region, despite its continuing salience, remains both elusive and contested and the implications in terms of security dynamics.¹⁴

The focus on Arab statehood ties well not just with thinking about statehood in a continuum of more or less consolidated polities in terms of state's capacity, but it also allows to link the ALS literature with the critical accounts of analyses of the post-Westphalian international system, supposedly based on equally sovereign states,¹⁵ whose sovereignty however is often fragile and where the territorial dimension of it can be spatially or temporally limited.¹⁶

As aptly argued by Wendy Brown, namely, 'Post-Westphalian' does not indicate the obsolescence of the nation-state, or the end of the Westphalian state system *per se*, but rather stands for a 'formation that is *temporally after but not over* that to which it is affixed'.¹⁷ What therefore deserves attention, and further empirical and theoretical reflections, is that states may persist as non-sovereign actors, something which ALS neatly encapsulates. One of the most intriguing aspects to be investigated in this respect is where sovereignty migrates to, which substate or transnational actors exert functions typically pertaining to the sovereign, for instance the exercise and threat of violence. This limited domestic sovereignty, or statehood, can notably manifest itself in hybrid sovereign relations, be it between the state and foreign powers, intervening and interfering to various extent in its domestic affairs, or internally if and when competing actors mobilize and contest the central authority legitimacy or power. In contrast to more classical security governance approaches, referring to ALS – and focusing on the coercive nature of the central authority and its ability to impose and implement decisions, stresses the power dimension over more standard governance-related functions intended as 'intentional action towards providing public services for a given community'.¹⁸

Over the past two decades, the field of governance studies has boomed¹⁹ and key adjectives defining specific features of security governance settings have emerged, depicting political phenomena that originate beyond the state level and use institutions other than the official ones, also applied to most of the developing world.²⁰ While, traditionally, a focus on governance is inspired by a functional logic whereby relevant actors are those providing for public goods, no matter what these actors' nature is, be they public or private, state or non-state,²¹ we aim to accommodate this shortcoming by leaving more space to analyses of power relations among security actors, by historically tracing their evolution as their capacity to influence security dynamics changes. What often also lacks in security governance readings are conceptualizations of causal logics explaining under which conditions legitimate governance can be achieved in states with limited sovereignty.²²

Interestingly enough, a number of relevant observations have been drawn from literature on rebel, insurgent and real governance.²³ As Tilly noticed 'even in zones of civil war and widespread brawling, most people most of the time are interacting in nonviolent ways'.²⁴ This approach has paved the way to the study of what is now called 'real governance' that, in an attempt to go beyond a normative understanding of power to identify, it is intended to explore the actors that participate in the construction of the policy processes on a given territory.²⁵ In order to survive, even insurgent organizations, or governments, need to transform the power of violence into legitimate domination,²⁶ provide a series of services and support to the citizens they intend to attract and ultimately gain legitimacy by the same people they are trying to hijack into a new administrative unit.²⁷ Rebel organizations might want to, as a major strategy, try

and win the support of local populations and thus adapt to local beliefs, educate them or at least convince them to take the rebel's side.²⁸ This is also, in many respects, what any young or new state would have to do to secure support so that already Olson in 1993 had noticed that rebel organizations' goals have a tendency to overlap with the ones of embryonic states. In fact, insurgent and rebel governance, it has been argued, has a tendency to replicate the phases and approaches that led to the formation of a state.²⁹

Despite these attempts to provide more politicized accounts of governance, taking into account how the provision of goods can change according to the nature of actors involved, especially in conflict and war-torn contexts,³⁰ notions of governance in more peaceful political orders have struggled to effectively capture the dimension of power politics implicit in many – supposedly empirical – configurations of order. The vertical dimension of power and the provision of public goods, in particular, can be regarded as pertaining to two different conceptual spheres, statehood and governance. This is what we aim at problematizing by starting from empirically rich accounts of changing configurations of statehood and their implications in terms of security dynamics from Tunisia in the Maghreb to Yemen in the Arabian Peninsula. Consequently, this SI empirically investigates how instances of limited statehood affect not just the construction of security institutions domestically but impact on external security performance and how hybridity comes in various shapes and produces different effects according to the shape statehood takes in a contingent way and the nature of actors involved in the security realm.

Our expectation is to challenge scholarly works that have tended to emphasize top-down approaches to statehood and governance, drawing from governance, public administration and political science. In such view, the main actor in producing discourse on nation and statehood are authoritative and powerful institutions, in particular, the state. The rich and multifaceted empirical contributions to this special issue, on the other hand, adopting a much more sophisticated view, will offer insights – with theory-building potential – illuminating alternative conceptions of statehood that Western literature has struggled to systematically process and incorporate.³¹ Along similar lines, local reconstructions of statehood and of competitive claims to statehood by different actors will enable not just more empirically accurate depictions of complex security and insecurity dynamics, but different conceptions of security.

The empirical studies presented here are used, thus, to argue that there is a myriad of possible combinations that emerge in situations when power is shared between state and non-state actors, legitimate and less legitimate ones. In this collection, we identify a series of equilibria that these actors can find and a number of ways power can be shared, evenly or less evenly, between actors. What is important to notice, however, is that the empirical cases presented bring to a status quo that is observed, sometimes respected, until one or more actors find convenient to challenge it.



Our ultimate aim is to offer food for thought on unorthodox security conceptions, problematizing the conceptual straightjackets resting upon the concept of unconditional legitimacy of the state having emerged from a struggle to control political institutions and the ensuing identification of state security with citizen's security, and rather provide alternative conceptualizations of how different political orders can generate completely new security and insecurity dynamics.

Our three axes of research: three possible angles to look at state/non-state actors' interactions

The main focus of this special issue is on the multi-actor and multi-level nature of security governance across the Middle East and Africa, sidestepping the application of fictitious notions of state unitary actorness and an overly narrow focus on the necessity of an absolute monopoly of violence. In particular, our authors investigate, through a number of empirical case studies with strong conceptual components, the interplay between the mixed nature of security actors and the creation of specific security orders.

The articles of this special issue will thus test the nature and shapes 'areas of limited statehood' take, to be understood as more than geographical spaces, but rather spaces where non-state and external actors can either compete or cooperate with the state depending on the circumstances, creating non-hierarchical modes of steering.³² These non-hierarchical modes of rule are best defined as heterarchical ones. By heterarchical order we refer to systems with multiple, and often 'tangled' hierarchies, where units are variously related, generating multiple rankings according to capabilities or authority.³³ Hierarchy is another concept which resurfaces in the work of our authors as it points to the existence of multiple power rankings and multiple actors possessing coercive power.³⁴ This notion refers to political orders which are neither anarchic nor hierarchic but where the following features are present: (a) the lack of a clear superimposition of state coercive institutions over other coercive agents; (b) the existence of an oligopoly of violence, with blurred boundaries and tasks' definition among different security actors, even within the state; and (c) the existence of different hierarchies within a given political order, linked to different rankings associated to different functions.³⁵

As a complement to ALS, hierarchy could facilitate conceptualizations of complex political and security settings representing a distinct type of vertical differentiation, as opposed to anarchical settings, which, are unranked orders characterized by the fragmentation of political authority and an ensuing unclear distribution of coercive material capabilities.

In each case study, the nature of the area of limited statehood, territorial, functional, temporal, societal, impacts on the power dynamics among actors and issues of legitimacy. This is used to ascertain how the nature of the predominant

actor shapes specific features of limited statehood or hybrid sovereignty and their implications in terms of political and security orders.

Reflecting on a wide range of evidence, provided from Libya to Mali, Lebanon and Syria, the cases here presented prompt a reflection across three main angles, that are not necessarily mutually exclusive. They are used to construct an analytical prism helping us to theorize what happens when a state loses control over portions of its territory over key policy areas, or when it competes for influence with other external or subnational forces, creating new complex security architectures and various forms of hybrid political orders. State fragmentation is thus examined through three axes that we have called: claims to monopoly; agreement on oligopoly and entrepreneurs competition. In this respect, the studies of this special issue nicely dialogue with one another.

The first three papers deal with the problem of fragmentation and violence and, in particular, possible strategies by the state, or a major power group, to assert themselves as the main force over a given territory. Andrea Carboni and James Moody explore the activity of non-state armed groups during the Libyan civil conflict, highlighting the specific incentives offered by the different local conflict environments in eastern, western and southern Libya, shaping the process of armed group splintering and patterns of violence. They go as far as to argue that claims to authority and notions of statehood extend far beyond the state whereby governance relations are negotiated between state and non-state actors. From this angle, they suggest that conflict patterns, (in)stability and the prevailing political order are conditional on the nature of the dominant actor, their strategies, and modes of violence within their areas of influence.

The second paper, by Maria-Louise Clausen, follows a similar trajectory by demystifying the battle for power in Yemen by labelling as mere competition between state actors with limited legitimacy (rather than state/non-state actor competition) with each of them attempting to be the main one. Indeed, Clausen argues that the current conflict in Yemen is better understood as a competition over who controls the state, rather than as a conflict between the state and a non-state actor. It does so by tracing the historical trajectory taken by the Houthis as a political group and the fact that, in spite of their capacity to seize key government institutions, the persistent lack of internal legitimacy has prevented them from positioning themselves as a nationally relevant political elite, which has led to the fragmentation of the Yemeni state and institutions.

The theme of fragmentation of actors, actions and power is also dealt with by Damian Doyle and Tristan Dunning who, in their study, examine the heterarchy of actors in post-Daesh Iraq and develop a typology of post-Westphalian alternatives of security governance in Iraq during the coming period of reconstruction and reconciliation. They look at the myriad of actors competing, or collaborating within the territory of Iraq and how this has affected security, and perceptions of security, within the country.

The second axis of this special issue invites us to look at a different case, when state and non-state actors agree to establish a de facto oligopoly and, even if conflicts over power are possible, they create a relatively stable situation, where they share power. This is the key to understand Daniel Meier's paper dealing with cooperation between state and non-state actors through the case study of the Lebanese second Republic and the role of the Shia militia of Hizbullah resisting Israeli occupation of the southern part of the country to blur the discourse on limited statehood. Using examples from the marking of the Blue Line to the struggle against the jihadists groups on the Eastern border, he shows to what extent cooperation between state and Hizbullah, the key politically hybrid actor, can become harmonious, paving the way to a de facto new form of governance.

In a similar fashion, Edoardo Baldaro illustrates that fragmentation of a territory, and actors, may lead to a redistribution of power by actors that may accept an unstable status quo as the best possible compromise or outcome from a crisis situation. To do this, the paper invites us to reflect on the northern Mali system of security governance from 1992 to nowadays as an area of limited statehood. He identifies different phases, that of Militarization (1992–2002), Fragmentation (2002–2012) and Multiplication (2013–ongoing), leading to the fragmentation among micro-actors of power which never ceases to be redistributed and renegotiated.

Dynamics of decentralization and non-state actors are also illustrated by Philippe Droz Vincent through his study on the post-Quadhafi reconstruction processes in Libya as a process that, rather than rebuilding centralized authorities, and consolidate central governance, has involved multiple non-state actors, being supported by external actors, thereby fragmenting political power across transnational lines, thus raising questions about the quality of this mode of governance, both in theory and in practice.

In both the above cases, monopoly or oligopoly, actors – and all of them – may accept a given status quo but await opportunities. While quasi monopolistic forces rest while looking for a chance to definitely get rid of threats, and potential competitors, minor actors await the chance to seize power. Where this does not happen as a result of internal dynamics and actions, it can be fostered by external actors. Competition between a state and a to-be-state, both counting on interventions by regional powers, is excellently explained by Raymond Hinnebusch who examines the problematic export of the Westphalian system to MENA, taking the case of Syria as exemplar. By looking at the 'double state failure', he looks at the way Westphalian order has giving way to a heterarchic zone of limited statehood in which state sovereignty is contested by both international (supra-state) penetration and substate fragmentation. Indeed, he argues fragmented and overlapping governance, permeable and collapsing borders, the loss of sovereignty to trans-state movements are the 'competitive regime-building' of the Asad regime, which has reconfigured itself to fight civil war, and jihadist warlords, and the 'competitive interventionism'

by which global and regional powers seek to empower their rival proxies and forge spheres of influence.

Whilst internal forces can have a clear idea of the kind of support they need, this might not be so clear to external actors who could selectively, but not necessarily awarely, show support for some political elites, or actors, over others. This is the main point by Ruth Hanau Santini and Simone Tholens who demonstrate how external security assistance packages in Lebanon and Tunisia have ended up diluting emerging democratic reforms, and produced more coercive manifestation of state power. By doing this they argue that supposedly 'technical' international security assistance, by selectively targeting a limited number of actors, empowering them, de facto influences internal dynamics and reinforces the position of certain political elites vis-à-vis others, helping centralization processes and diluting the normative content of reform in the name of effectiveness.

The argument that fragmentation often leads to the fostering of subnational identities is also demonstrated by Christopher Phillips and Morten Valbjørn. In their study, they propose a comparative analysis exploring interactions between some selected fighting groups in Syria emphasizing different kinds of identities and their connections with outside actors. They suggest that attempts by state and non-state actors to identify with a sub-unit of a state are received with a mix of reluctance (by foreign powers, keep to foster a national unity idea) and enthusiasm (by foreign non-state actors) who do not deny their importance and attempt to use it to pursue their own goals.

Conclusion: on governance and sovereignty

Taken altogether, these contributions highlight three main points. First, there are many forms of non-standard governance, they rely on a compromise between actors, that eventually accept a certain status quo and start acting in the framework of informal agreements or rules identified. Second, it is possible to identify a continuum between forms of governance in ALS. It starts from informal individual practices and it ends at insurgency, war, armed conflict. This is in no way limited to the South of the world or ineffective states. But in ALS, where the central authority fails to implement its decisions, and where other actors providing for services and goods can earn legitimacy and come to be viewed as political and security actors in their own rights, several security governance configurations can emerge.

Finally, it can be claimed that the effects above impact the nature of sovereignty which ceases to be posited in one central authority and gets splintered, fragmented, among several actors but also ends being diluted in its normative content by being acted upon in different ways, over different parts of the territory or in different policy areas, by different actors, enjoying either competing legitimacy or different forms of social legitimacy. The extent to which this



fragmentation of power occurs among actors in the security realm and the intensity of the dilution of the norm of sovereignty as a consequence of that directly impacts on the chances of consolidating a waning statehood.

We acknowledge that this special issue is only a first step in linking the strand of literature on limited statehood and hybrid orders to the contemporary security dynamics in the MENA region and the Sahel. We hope nonetheless that, by reconceptualizing these political orders through the guiding perspectives (in French *fils rouges*) of limited statehood and heterarchies, important reflections on the waning of sovereignty and the multiplication of hierarchies have emerged; these can be embraced too in the analysis of other regional orders.

Notes

1. Krasner and Risse, "External Actors."
2. Krasner, *Sovereignty*, 9.
3. Risse, *Governance Without a State*.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Thürer, 'The Failed State'; Rotberg, "State Failure and State Weakness."
6. Call, "The Fallacy of the Failed State"; Di John, 'The Causes and Consequences Of.'
7. Grimm et al., "Fragile States."
8. Call, "The Fallacy of the Failed State."
9. Call, "Beyond the 'Failed State'", Hehir, "The Myth of the Failed State"; Hill, "Beyond the Other"; and Patrick, "Failed States and Global Security."
10. Morris and Polese, *The Informal Post-socialist Economy*; Polese et al., *The Informal Economy*.
11. Chandler, "Responsibility to Protect?"; Call, "The Fallacy of the Failed State."
12. Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament*; Bourdieu, *On the State*; Hibou, "From Privatizing the Economy"; Jessop, *The State: Past, Present and Future*; Migdal, *Boundaries and Belonging*; Mitchell, "The Limits of the State"; Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In"; and Tilly, "War Making and State Making."
13. Ayubi, *The Arab State*; Dawisha and Zartman, *Beyond Coercion*; Hinnebusch, "Towards a Historical sociology"; Hudson, *Arab Politics*; Kienle and Sika, *The Arab Uprisings*; Saouli, *The Arab State*; and Owen, *State, Power and Politics*.
14. Hanau Santini and Tholens, "Security Assistance"; Hanau Santini, *Limited Statehood*; Hanau Santini and Moro, "Between Hierarchy and Heterarchy."
15. Krasner, *Sovereignty*.
16. Cooley and Spruyt, *Contracting States*.
17. Brown, *Walled States*, 21.
18. Mayntz, *Governance*, 67.
19. Rosenau and Czempiel, *Governance Without Government*; Hooghe and Marks, *Multilevel Governance*; Kirchner and Sperling, *Global Security Governance*; and Benz, *Governance*.
20. Boege et al., "Hybrid Political Orders"; North et al., "Limited Access Orders."
21. Klute and Embalò, *The Problem of Violence*.
22. Coggins, 'Review of Risse'.
23. Péclard and Mechoulan, *Rebel Governance*.
24. Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, 12.
25. Boege et al., "On Hybrid Political Orders"; Meagher et al., "Unraveling Public Authority"; Menkhaus, "State Failure, State-building"; and Menkhaus, 'Somalia: Governance.'

26. Schlichte, *The Dynamics of States*.
27. Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers*.
28. Kasfir, "Guerrillas and Civilian Participation," 281, Kevlihan, *Aid, Insurgency*.
29. Olson, *Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development*; Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers*; and Tilly, "War Making and State Making."
30. Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers*; Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence*.
31. Krasner, *Sovereignty*.
32. Risse, *Governance Without a State?*
33. Donnelly, "Rethinking Political Structures."
34. Ibid.
35. Hanau Santini and Moro, "Between Hierarchy and Hierarchy."

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